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White House approved, Memorandum of Conversation
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DATE: Friday, June 29
4:45 p.m.
Part II

SUBJECT: Communism in Latin America

PARTICIPANTS: President Kennedy
President Lopez Mateos
Foreign Minister Tello
Ambassador Mann
Mr. Martin
Ambassador Carrillo Flores

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President Kennedy brought up the subject of the danger of the spread of Communism in Latin America, particularly in the Caribbean basin, as a result of Sino/Soviet influence in Cuba and the use of Cuba as a springboard.

President Kennedy first asked whether President Lopez Mateos thought that the Cuban people would be able in the foreseeable future to recover their sovereignty from the Castro regime. President Lopez Mateos expressed the opinion that while the Castro regime had lost ground with the Cuban people because it had perverted the original purposes of the revolution and had come under the influence of the Communist bloc, it seemed doubtful, as a practical matter, that the Cuban people would be able to do very much about this in the foreseeable future because of the nature and military strength of the Castro regime. President Lopez Mateos doubted that the Communist revolution could gradually become a national type of revolution such as the one which took place in Mexico.

There was some discussion about the ability and disposition of the Soviet Union to give meaningful aid to Cuba.

President Kennedy, following up on President Lopez Mateos' appraisal of Castro's chances for survival, then asked what President Lopez Mateos thought could be done to prevent the spread of Soviet power and doctrine via Cuba to other American Republics. President Kennedy mentioned his concern with Soviet activities in countries like Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala and Ecuador. Guerrilla activities in Colombia and the recent revolts in Venezuela were specifically mentioned.

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President Lopez Mateos

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President Lopez Mateos acknowledged that this was a very difficult question. He said that Mexico had the ability to deal with Communist subversion and implied each country should take whatever measures are necessary to defend itself. Mr. Tello suggested at this point that it is important that Latin American countries prevent their territories from being used as a base of operations against other American Republics.

President Lopez Mateos repeated the familiar Mexican thesis: The important thing is to create better economic and social conditions and especially to provide jobs. When the people were better off, he thought it would not be easy for the Communists to lead them astray. He stressed his opinion that the Alliance for Progress is the best way to combat Communism.

President Kennedy replied that he did not underestimate the importance of economic growth and social progress; nor was he suggesting that Communism was an immediate danger in the United States or Mexico. But he pointed out it would take a decade to achieve the objectives of the Alliance for Progress even under the best of conditions. In the meantime, the question was: What did Mexico think should be done to prevent the spread of Communism in other American Republics? President Kennedy pointed out that, as Cuba shows, once a Communist regime has fastened itself on a country, it is most difficult for the people to rid themselves of it.

The Foreign Minister then recalled that Mexico was the first country at Punta del Este to openly espouse the doctrine of incompatibility between Cuba and the inter-American system and argued that this was a very substantial contribution to the success of Punta del Este because this was the thesis that prevailed rather than the Colombian or Peruvian doctrines. He explained again the Mexican juridical doctrine of the necessity for amending the Charter of the OAS so that there would be a sound legal basis for collective action.

The Foreign Minister went on to say that the Castro regime had made many "mistakes" and in his opinion would continue to make mistakes. He said that Chile, for example, had recently been on the verge of breaking relations with Cuba. (Ambassador Carrillo Flores later informed Ambassador Mann that he interpreted Tello's statements about Castro's "mistakes" to mean that Mexico might later break relations with the Castro regime because of its interventionist tendencies in Mexico).

President Kennedy

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President Kennedy returned again and again to his question of what President Lopez Mateos thought was the best way to deal with the obvious danger of an expansion of Communist influence in Latin America. President Lopez Mateos each time repeated his view that rapid economic development and social progress was the answer. In the end he said he would give the matter more thought.

In the course of the discussion, President Kennedy stated that the United States wished to deal with the problem of Communist penetration in the hemisphere in cooperation with other Latin American states like Mexico. He said he wanted to keep in close touch with Mexico on this point and to reach agreement on practical measures which could be taken by American states to deal with the threat. He said the United States had no plans at the present time for unilateral military action against the Castro regime.

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